

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 7158

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: CASTE WILL BE MAJOR FACTOR IN VITA AZAMGARH BY-ELECTION

REF: NEW DELHI 4895, 5362

1. SUMMARY: WITH THE MEMORY OF THE JANATA'S NARROW VICTORY IN THE KARNAL BY-ELECTION STILL FRESH IN THEIR MINDS (REFTELS), JANATA LEADERS ARE MAKING A MAJOR EFFORT TO WIN THE NEXT BY-ELECTION TO FILL A VACANT LOK SABHA SEAT, SCHEDULED TO BE HELD IN AZAMGARH DISTRICT OF EASTERN U.P. ON MAY 7. AND TO DO SO, JANATA AND OTHER PARTIES ARE MAKING A BLATANT APPEAL TO THE VOTERS ALONG CASTE LINES. INDEED, POLARIZATION ALONG CASTE AND COMMUNITY LINES -- TO A DEGREE ALMOST UN-CONFIDENTIAL

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PRECEDENTED IN RECENT INDIAN POLITICS -- IS THE PRE-DOMINANT FACTOR IN THE AZAMGARH CONTEST, AND IT MAY WELL SET THE PATTERN FOR THE FUTURE COURSE OF POLITICS IN NORTHERN INDIA. END SUMMARY.

2. THE AZAMGARH LOK SABHA SEAT WAS WON IN MARCH 1977 BY THE JANATA CANDIDATE, RAM NARESH YADAV, BY A MARGIN

OF SOME 100,000 VOTES. THE SEAT HAS BEEN VACANT SINCE YADAV BECAME THE CHIEF MINISTER OF U.P.(LAST JUNE. AZAMGARH IS A POOR, BACKWARD CONSTITUENCY OF SOME 1.1 MILLION INHABITANTS AND AN ELECTORATE OF 640,000 VOTERS. THERE IS NO INDUSTRY TO SPEAK OF. THE SINGLE FEATURE WHICH ALL OBSERVERS (AS WELL AS THE POLITICANS) HAVE FOCUSED ON IS THE CASTE AND COMMUNITY COMPOSITION OF THE DISTRICT. YADAVS, A "BACKWARD" CASTE OF SMALL FARMERS, MAKE UP THE LARGEST GROUP WITH 26 PERCENT OF THE VOTERS. THEY ARE FOLLOWED BY JARIJANS (20 PERCENT), MUSLIMS (16 PERCENT), RAJPUTS (13 PERCENT), OTHER "BACKWARD" CASTES (EIGHT PERCENT), AND BHUMIHARS (FIVE PERCENT).

3. ALTHOUGH 18 INDEPENDENTS ARE IN THE RUNING, THE CONTEST ESSENTIALLY COMES DOWN TO A THREE-WAY RACE AMONG THE CANDIDATES OF THE JANATA AND THE TWO CONGRESS PARTIES. CASTE AND COMMUNITY IDENTIFICATION WAS OBVIOUSLY THE FOREMOST CONSIDERATION IN THE SELECTION OF THESE CANDIATES, AS THE THREE MAJOR PARTIES SEEK TO WOO SPECIFIC GROUPS. AS HIS NAME SUGGESTS, THE JANATA CANDIDATE, SEPTUAGENARIAN RAM BACHAN YADAV, COMES FROM THE PREDOMINANT LOCAL CASTE GROUP. HE IS A WELL-KNOWN FIGURE IN THE DISTRICT AND IS REGARDED AS A TRUSTED ASSOCIATE OF GOI HOME MINISTER CHARAN SINGH AND CHIEF MINISTER YADAAV, THE CANDIATE OF THE OFFICIAL CONGRESS, CHANDRAJIT YADAV, ALSO HAILS FROM THE YADAV COMMUNITY. ALTHOUGH HE LOST IN THE CNSTITUENCY

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LAST YEAR IN THE JANATA "WAVE," YADAV WAS A POWER FUL FIGURE IN THE DISTRICT, HAVING TWICE REPRESENTED IT IN THE LOK SABHA. THE LEFTIST, PRO-CPI YADAV WAS MRS. GANDHI'S MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINES DURING THE EMERGENCY. THE CONGRESS (I) CANDIDATE, MRS. MOHSINA KIDWAI, A MUSLIM FROM LUCKNOW, IS THE CHIEF OF THE CONGRESS (I) IN U.P.

4. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS AND OBSERVERS WE HAVE SPOKEN WITH WHO HAVE RENCNTLY VISITED THE DISTRICT, CASTE IS THE PREDOMINANT FACTOR AROUND WHICH PARTY STRATEGIES AND CAMPAIGNING ARE TURNING. "ISSUES" HAVE TAKEN A BACK SEAT TO UNABASHED APPEALS TO CASTE AND COMMUNITY LOYALTIES. RELYING ON ITS IMAGE AS A "FRIEND" OF LOWER CASTE SMALL FARMERS, JANATA EVIDENTLY HOPES TO WIN THE BULK OF THE VOTES FROM THE YADAVS AND OTHER "BACKWARD" CASTES AND ALSO TO PICK UP SUPPORT FROM THE RAJPUTS, A LANDED UPPER CASTE. THE OFFICIAL CONGRESS CANDIDATES IS COMPETING FOR THIS SAME GROUP, BEING A YADAV HIMSELF.

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AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

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DESPITE HIS LOCAL REPUTATION, HOWEVER, CHANDRAJIT YADAV MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY WINNING MUCH SUPPORT FROM THESE CASTES. CONGRESS (I) CLEARLY HOPES TO RECONSTRUCT THE TRADITIONAL ALLIANCE OF BRAHMINS, HARIJANS AND MUSLIMS, ON WHICH CONGRESS MAJORITIES WERE ALWAYS FOUNDED, AS THE KEY TO ELECTORAL SUCCESS. THE CHOICE OF THE MUSLIM MRS. KIDWAI WAS CLEARLY NO ACCIDENT, GIVEN THE SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF MUSLIM VOTERS. IN ADDITION, SHE MAY ATTRACT A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF WOMEN VOTERS. ON THE OTHER HAND, HER IMAGE AS AN "OUTSIDER" MAY WORK AGAINST HER.

5. AS WAS THE CASE IN THE KARNAL BY-ELECTION IN EARLY APRIL, ALLTHREE PARTIES RECOGNIZE THAT MUCYH IS AT STAKE IN AZAMGARH. FOR THE JANATA, THE ELECTION WILL BE A
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TEST TO DETERMINE WHETHER IT CAN SUCCESSFULLY FORGE A WINNING COMBINATION OF INTERMEDIATE CASTES AS THE FOUNDATION OF ITS FUTURE HINDI-BELT ELECTORAL STRATEGY AND

AS THE KEYSTONE OF ITS POLICY ORIENTATION S A GOVERNMENT. A WIN IN AZAMGARH COULD INDUCE THE PARTY TO FOCUS ITS ATTENTIONS EVEN MORE ON THE "BACKWARDS" AS ITS PRIME CONSTITUENCY. IN ANY EVENT, WHATEVER ARE THE REAL FACTORS, THE OUTCOME OF THIS BY-ELECTION WILL SURELY BE VIEWED BY OBSERVERS AS ANOTHER BARMOETER OF JANATA'S STANDING IN THE "HINDI HEARTLAND" A YEAR AFTER IT SWEEPED THE REGION IN THE 1977 LOK SABHA POLL. THE RESULT WILL ALSO HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE BALANCE OF FORCES WITHIN THE PARTY, PARTICULARLY IN U.P. AND ADJOINING STATES AS WELL AS ON THE FORTUNES OF HOME MINISTER CHARAN SINGH. FOR THE OFFICAL CONGRESS, IT IS A MATTER OF SHEER SURIVAL, WHIL MRS. GANDHI EVIDENTLY SEES THE CONTEST AS A TEST OF HER "NORTHERN STRATEGY." ALL THREE PARTIES HAVE SENT THEIR BIG GUNS ON THE CAMPAGIN TRAIL. MRS. GANDHI MADE TWO TOURS OF THE DISTRICT AND REPORTEDLY DREW LARTE CROWDS. THE OFFICIAL CONGRESS, LACKING CHARISMATIC SPEAKERS, HAD TO BE CONTENT WITH Y.B. CHAVAN AND DR. KARAN SINGH. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE JANATA'S SENIOR TRIUMVIRATE DECLINED TO CAMPAIGN; DEFNSE MINISTER JAGJIVAN RAM AND PRIME MINISTER DESAI REPORTEDLY BECAUSE THEY DO NOT ON PRINCIPLE ENGAGE IN SUCH BY-ELECTRIONEERING, AND CHARAN SINGH ON THE BASIS OF HIS ILLNESS AND HOSPITALIZATION.

6. JANATA LEADERS ARE ADOPTING A CUATIOUS APPROACH IN SPECULATING ABOUT THE OUTCOME, EVIDENTLY IN PREPARTION KFOR A POSSIBLE LOSS. IN A RECENT CONVERSATION WITHUS, ONE JANATA GENERAL SECRETARY SOUGHT TO DOWNPLAY THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AZAMGARH BY POINTING OUT THAT RULING CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTIES IN THE PAST HAVE FREQUENTLY LOST SUCH MID-TERM BY-ELECTIONS. THE GENERAL TONE OF HIS COMENTS SUGGESTED THAT THE JANATA CANDIDATE MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY IN OVERCOMING THE COMBINATION OF BRAHMINS, MUSLIMS AND HARIJANS ON WHICH THE CONGRESS (I) IS BASING ITS HOPES.

7. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF THE AZAMGARH CONTEST, PERHPAS ITS MOST IMPORTANT EFFECT HAS BEEN THE DEGREE TO WHICH IT PORTENDS A RETURN TO THE POLITICS OF CASTEISM IN IDNA. OBSERVERS WILL BE WATCHING THE AZAMGARH OUTCOME CAREFULLY TO SEE WHETHER THE JANATA CAN SUCCEED IN FINDING A COMBINATION OF CASTE GROUPS WHICH WILL ENABLE IT TO MAINTAIN ITS HOLD IN THE HINDI HEARTLAND DESPITE THE OBVLIOUS INEFFEDTIVENESS OF ITS STATE GOVERNMENTS IN THIS REGION AND THE GORWING POPULAR DISSATISFACTION WITH THEM AND WITH THE GOVERNMENT AT THE CENTER.
GOHEEN

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